

## **The Ten Basic Steps: Step #10: Exploring the New Testament**

### **Lesson 7-Prison Epistles, Thessalonians, Pastoral Epistles.**

**Objective: To examine the character of the Apostle Paul as presented in these epistles.**

Read: Ephesians

Memorize: Colossians 2:6-7

1. Prison Epistles
2. The Thessalonian Epistles
3. The Pastoral Epistles
4. Life Application

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are called the "prison" epistles because they were written by Paul during his first imprisonment mentioned in Acts 28.

Paul wrote Ephesians to encourage the faith of the believers in Ephesus. In this Epistle, Paul explains the nature and purpose of the Church, the Body of Christ.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul emphasizes the true joy that comes from Jesus Christ alone. He wrote on the themes of humility, self-sacrifice, unity, and Christian living.

In Colossians, Paul presents Christ as God in the flesh, Lord of all creation, and the head of the Church. Paul also addresses the problem of false teachers promoting legalism.

In his letter to Philemon, Paul encourages forgiveness for Philemon's slave, Onesimus, who may have stolen from his master and run away. By writing this letter, Paul encourages believers everywhere to treat others with Christian love and fellowship.

In his Thessalonians Epistles, Paul assures believers at Thessalonica of the return of Christ and corrects their misconceptions about the resurrection and the timing of the second coming of Christ. His letters focus on courage in the face of persecution and being prepared for the coming of Christ.

From the time of his first missionary journey, Paul always had co-workers. The Pastoral Epistles - 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus - were written to those who were helping him to strengthen the churches he had founded.

Timothy was a young leader, an elder in the church at Ephesus. Paul's first letter to Timothy is a handbook of church administration and discipline. In his second letter, the apostle encourages Timothy to be bold in the face of opposition and persecution and to remain faithful in sound doctrine, loyalty, and endurance.

Titus, a Greek convert, was Paul's representative to the churches on Crete. Paul's letter to Titus tells him how to organize and oversee those churches.

## Prison Epistles

Ephesians. The purpose of this letter was to show the Gentiles that they were on an equal footing with the Jews in receiving the blessings of salvation (see Ephesians 2:8-22; 3:6). What had been the prospects of Gentiles receiving the blessings of salvation in previous times (2:11,12)?

Through what event were the blessings of salvation made available to all (2:13-18)?

From Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19, list the blessings of salvation that all Christians now enjoy. How can you use this information for encouragement?

Philippians. Paul wrote this letter to the church he had founded (Acts 16) to thank them for the money they sent him for his support while in prison. In writing it, he also sought to overcome the disunity in the church between two women, Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2). With this disunity overcome, the church could stand firmly together in preaching the gospel without fear to those around them (Philippians 1:27-28).

Read Philippians 1:12-30. What had Paul been doing in Rome that would encourage the Philippians to be bold in proclaiming the gospel (1:13,14)?

How did Paul's attitude regarding the future help to encourage the Philippians to stand fearlessly for Christ (1:18-26)?

What was Paul's chief reason for being happy about the gift the Philippians had sent him (Philippians 4:10-19)?

Take time to thank God for the gifts (spiritual and material) that Christians have given you this past week.

Colossians. Paul had never visited the church at Colosse, but reports regarding the increase of false teaching there had reached him in Rome. Since he was an apostle to all the Gentiles, he felt it necessary to write and warn that church.

The false teaching stated that instead of Christ being the only mediator between God and man, there were certain angelic beings through whom man must also go in order to know God. Consequently, Paul's main emphasis in this Epistle is the deity and all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

List at least three things Paul says about Jesus Christ that show it is unnecessary to seek any additional ways to reach God (Colossians 1:12-22).

Since Christ is all-sufficient, what is the Christian to do (Colossians 2:6-7)?

What practical effect will submission to the Lordship and uniqueness of Christ have upon the Christian's life (Colossians 3:1-11)? What evidence of submissiveness do you find in your life? Where do you need to improve in this area?

Philemon. While in prison at Rome, Paul had led Onesimus, a runaway slave, to the Lord. He discovered that this slave's master was Philemon, a personal friend of Paul's living at Colosse. In those days, the penalty for a slave who had run away was either death or brutal punishment. Paul wrote Philemon asking him to forgive Onesimus for what he had done and to receive him as a Christian brother.

This Epistle stands as a great example of the profound change for good that Christ makes in all human relations.

State in your own words at least three arguments Paul used to persuade Philemon to receive Onesimus in love. Who do you know that needs this kind of forgiveness?

## **The Thessalonian Epistles**

The first epistles Paul ever wrote were those to the church he had founded at Thessalonica in Macedonia. These were written from Corinth (Acts 18:1-18) soon after Paul had left Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians. Paul had had to leave Thessalonica very hastily because of persecution (Acts 17:10). The enemies of the gospel there had tried to disillusion the newly won Christians by charging that Paul was only a fair-weather friend who had left them alone because of difficult circumstances. To answer this charge Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians.

What effect had the Thessalonian's conversion had on the Christians of the surrounding area (I Thessalonians 1:7-10)?

The lives of those to whom Paul wrote had been changed. How did this prove that those who had preached the gospel to them were godly men (I Thessalonians 1:5-6)?

Give two ways in which Paul's ministry at Thessalonica made it impossible for him to be an insincere person (I Thessalonians 2:1-10). Think of someone who exemplifies qualities that Paul had. What can you learn from that person's example?

2 Thessalonians. Some questions regarding the circumstances of Christ's second coming had arisen after the Thessalonians received Paul's first epistle. They were troubled because they had to unjustly endure great sufferings and persecutions for Christ (II Thessalonians 1:3-12). Some also had become slack in doing their work because they thought Christ's second coming would occur at any moment.

What do you think the Christian's attitude should be toward persecution?

What is to be his attitude toward work (II Thessalonians 3:6-15)? How can you apply this to your life?

## **The Pastoral Epistles**

These letters were written in the period between Paul's first Roman imprisonment in A.D. 60-62 (Acts 28) and his final martyrdom under the emperor Nero in A.D. 66. He wrote 1 and 2 Timothy to help Timothy in his work with the church at Ephesus. Titus was written to Paul's co-worker on the island of Crete.

1 Timothy. Read I Timothy 6. What are the two things that are necessary for contentment in life (1 Timothy 6:6-8)?

What great danger confronts those who seek after riches (verses 9-12)? What attitude should Christians who are wealthy have toward money (verses 17-19)? How does money tempt you? Which verse will help you overcome this wrong desire?

2 Timothy. Paul wrote 2 Timothy just before he was martyred. He writes as though it may be his last word to Timothy.

What are the last commands Paul gave him (II Timothy 4:1-5)?

What two means will help Timothy remain true to his calling after Paul has gone (II Timothy 3:10-11; 14-17)? List several ways this Bible study has helped you remain true.

Titus. Paul wrote this Epistle after his first imprisonment in Rome to encourage Titus and strengthen his ability to minister under opposition. Paul instructed Titus to admonish the people to be "sound in the faith" and hold to "sound doctrine."

What are some of the things a Christian should be careful to do in the unbelieving world in which he lives (Titus 3:1-2)?

How can you apply verses 1 and 2 to a situation in your life? What reason does Paul give for a Christian living this way (Titus 3:3-7)?

## **Life Application**

Name two things you have learned from Paul's character in this study.

From Philippians 3:1 and 4:4, what approach to life do you think Paul would advise for you?

Is that always possible? How?

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